

Draft

Board of Forestry and Fire Protection Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) Range Lands Focus Group

**Minutes
January 4, 2005**

Attending:

Ken Zimmerman
Clancy Dutra
Leonard Hale
Henry Giacomini
Chuck Pritchard
Mel Thompson
Jeff Stephens
Jon Gustafson

Representing

RMAC Chairman
California Farm Bureau
Watershed Fire Council of Southern California
California Farm Bureau
Resource Conservation Districts
California Wool Growers Association
CDF / RMAC Executive Secretary
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Call to Order and Introductions:

Focus Group Chair Chuck Pritchard called the meeting to order on January 4, 2005 at 8:15 AM followed by introductions of all attending the meeting.

Item 1 A Dedicated Workforce for VMP:

He began discussion of agenda item 1, dedicated workforce for VMP, by relaying his discussion with Fred Frank (retired CDF) regarding the manner by which VMP burns were conducted in the past. The following are key points made by Mr. Frank:

1. Agencies are becoming compartmentalized in there approach to performing projects.
2. Agencies are going to shorter work weeks where overtime and worker benefits have become a serious budgetary issue. Historically overtime was not a serious issue since projects were initiated and completed without the impacts of the Fair Labor Standards Act.
3. The Emergency Fund is not included in the base budget for CDF. Therefore the true cost of fighting fire is not reflected in the CDF budget annually.
4. Air quality management has become increasing difficult to deal with for conducting prescribed burning. Mr. Frank suggested more pretreatment of brush to minimize smoke impacts.
5. Limits need to be placed on liability.
6. Treatment areas require prioritization.

7. Post fire vegetation management is in need of serious consideration by agencies. There is a period within the first 4 years following fire when treatments can be highly effective for maintaining low fuel loads.
8. Historically Range Improvement Associations were effective for developing projects without compensation for those who served. They no longer provide this role.

Chuck Pritchard further stated that we have a problem in house with the cost of doing business. Unions greatly impact our ability to do work. Leonard Hale cited the Fair Labor Standards Act as a primary source for added cost. Chuck Pritchard added that the true cost of fuels management is not looked at realistically. The cost of not doing fuels modification needs to be factored into the analysis. Leonard Hale commented, and the group as a whole agreed that events such as mud slides, diminished reservoir storage capacity, damage to habitat, burned timber, etc., reflect the real cost of untreated fuels.

Ken Zimmerman commented that if the Department can not afford to do an extensive VMP program that is more effective then we should consider the cost savings to the Department if it were eliminated. Perhaps the recommendation to the Board should be to eliminate the VMP and divert the funding into other areas where work can be accomplished. This resulted in discussion as to the merits and implications of making such a recommendation, including whether program elimination is politically feasible as noted by Chuck Pritchard. He further proposed the concept of a major paradigm shift whereby funding used for fire suppression be diverted for fuels reduction.

Ken Zimmerman proposed the concept of a dedicated work force for each CDF Region whose sole purpose is vegetation management. They would be mobile services multiple Units. Chuck Pritchard indicated that the California Conservation Corps be utilized to a much larger extent, however, their qualifications to perform prescribed fire tasks were brought into question by the group. Chuck Pritchard stated that they may be looked upon as a labor source under supervision by CDF. Range Improvement Organizations may serve to designate projects

Leonard Hale cited an example in LA County where the opportunity to burn in the winter period is extended by crushing with a tractor/roller type machine. He stated that it may be the only machine of its type in the state. Ken Zimmerman cited a publication by Ventura County that lists various types of equipment that is used for treated vegetation.

Chuck Pritchard returned to the subject of a dedicated work force asking how it may be paid for. Ken Zimmerman responded by stating that the existing VMP budget may be diverted to cover the cost, or a budget change proposal that assigns funding. Chuck Pritchard noted that VMP funds are not being spent properly; however, we (RMAC) should be looking at additional sources of funding in order to get ahead of the problem.

Ken Zimmerman noted that the will to do fuels treatment will come from the local communities. If it is done within critical areas previously identified by partnerships then larger landscapes may be treated. Big Bear is a case in point. It took a fires event to convince people to do something. Leonard Hale noted that the work in Big Bear was tried previously years ago and was unsuccessful due to the community resisting and not supporting any change to vegetation.

Mel Thompson commented that the greatest potential for partnerships is with the general public. Educating the public may be the effective prevention. It is a social issue. He went on to pose several questions: Are fuel treatment projects viable to begin with? Are we doing projects that are effective? Does this treatment need to be done? Leonard Hale responded indicating there are success stories where fuels treatment does work in slowing fires down and allowing safe areas for fighting fire.

Mel Thompson stated that prescribed grazing in other countries is successful, but it is not being encouraged or organized in this country. Jon Gustafson responded by stating that the number of livestock in the US is not sufficient to address the problem of fuels management. However, greater acceptance and use of grazing can be achieved with a public education program.

Ken Zimmerman used this opportunity to mention the recent grazing workshop held at UC Davis, organized by Wolfgang Pittroff, and attended by himself and Jeff Stephens. He cited several key points made at the workshop

1. There is a shortage of animals available for fuels work.
2. The problem of fuels management persists over a very large area so the use of animals must be made in very selective way.
3. Timing is critical in terms of when target species are palatable, and when they are most susceptible to control.
4. There is a science developing for the use of livestock in regards to when they are most effective and animal health.
5. There is resistance to the concept of paying livestock managers for grazing surfaces; i.e. agricultural producers should not profit from public lands, or its free forage so why pay for the service.

Chuck Pritchard restated that fuels treatment following fire is a 4-5 year interval to maintain the condition. However, running livestock is a 365 days per year operations. Animals need a place to go for water, feed, and care every day.

Mel Thompson expressed support of the fact that grazing issues are being thought out as outlined by the grazing workshop. Chuck Pritchard asked if the Board was represented at the workshop. The response was no. Mr. Pritchard cited this as a familiar problem where it is difficult to attract key people to workshops of this type.

Mel Thompson was encouraged; however, that grazing was getting some attention by academics and government.

Jon Gustafson; Ecological Site Descriptions:

Chuck Pritchard invited Jon Gustafson to make comment regarding NRCS's efforts with Ecological Site Descriptions. Mr. Gustafson provided the following comment:

Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD) describe the potential plant communities that are possible on a site given climate and soils. They can be used to describe the dynamics of plant change over time according to site characteristics. Local fire protection agencies may find them useful since they can be used to predict the return times needed in order to maintain desirable vegetation. It would be useful to NRCS if CDF and the USFS provided fire frequency data, especially in blue oak woodlands. Knowing what vegetation types naturally evolve toward is useful for educating landowners on the frequency of fuels treatment needed to maintain the desirable state.

Jon Gustafson stated that the current status of ESD development in California is very poor. There is a website where fire frequency data could be added which would be useful to the NRCS effort.

Ken Zimmerman asked who has funding for developing the ESD's. Jon Gustafson responded by stating that NRCS has a contract with UC to produce water quality workshops and provides for development of the ESD's as a by-product. Expertise to develop the information is limited. The USFS in northern California is quite interested due to declining habitat for wildlife. Funding is limited. Mr. Gustafson would like to complete the Sierras and Coastal foothill regions as demonstrations. He also stated that management of the sites is at the discretion of the land owner. Leonard Hale asked how multiple owners are convinced to cooperate with their management strategy. Chuck Pritchard replied that ESD's are a tool for landowners to use to promote the conditions they seek for their property. Fire services may find it useful to educate people on what may be expected on a site in future years.

Chuck Pritchard recommended the following meetings, contacts, and publication:

- Meeting of the Quivira Coalition 4th Annual Conference January 13-15, 2005, Albuquerque New Mexico. Ranchers and Conservation concerns working together.
- Nevada Rangeland Resources Commission, Reno, Nevada is a suggested contact. 775-684-5333.

- Recommended Reference: "Conquest of the Land Through 7000 Years," NRCS. Jon Gustafson will provide copies and Jeff Stephens will distribute to all members.
- "The West 2000" by Range Magazine. Provides a breakdown of land ownership in the Western States and federal management costs. USFS is \$16.71 / acre; BLM \$4.95 / acre.

Chuck Pritchard listed a summary of issues as a result of the discussion as follows:

Mobile Dedicated Workforce

The formation of Partnerships, Range Improvement Groups, General Public, etc., those are equipped to design and implement projects.

Problems Noted with Partnerships

Liability Limitations

Cost

Areas of primary concern

Management by the CDF Units

Prescribed Grazing and problems associated with public education and acceptance.

Post Fire Management including return times.

Ken Zimmerman asked how Mr. Pritchard would be presenting these issues to RMAC. He responded by stating that they would be placed in form of a position paper for consideration by RMAC.

Chuck Pritchard then approached the group on the subject of how the Insurance companies can be involved in applying pressure for fuels treatment. Clancy Dutra responded by stating the Insurance companies already apply pressure to some extent in the form of surcharges for structures where vegetation is not properly cleared for fire safe. The new legislation that requires clearance up to 100 feet around structures was also discussed. It was noted that the Insurance industry had input with this legislation. Jeff Stephens obtained copies of the bill itself and distributed it to RMAC during the meeting.

Chuck Pritchard asked for contacts with the State Insurance Commission and the California Association of Realtors. Jeff Stephens will provide these contacts.

Jeff Stephens was asked to explain the Vegetation Management Program (VMP) Programmatic EIR for the benefit of Mel Thompson. The manner by which a programmatic document can be used for multiple projects under CEQA was explained and the nature of the VMP PEIR specifically.

Item 4 RMAC Role with the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection:

Chuck Pritchard began discussion on the subject of RMAC and its role with the Board. At one time RMAC was going to write a white paper addressing RMAC's role and mission for the Board; however this project was never completed.

Henry Giacomini made the observation that RMAC is most effective when focused on specific tasks. Ken Zimmerman noted the work completed on AB 1983 created some tension between the Board and RMAC, given that RMAC was viewed by the Board as operating outside of its mission. He then summarized work that the Board has identified for RMAC to become involved as follows

- Sudden Oak Death
- Examination of the CDF Vegetation Management Program
- Regulation/Management of Oak Woodlands

Jeff Stephens commented that based on observation RMAC is most effective with the Board when a physical presence is maintained, especially at the Board Committee meetings where detailed interaction with Board members is possible. In addition the current Executive Officer with the Board is very supportive of RMAC and is looking for opportunities for RMAC to be of assistance. Chuck Pritchard maintained that it needs to be a two way flow of information whereby the Board independently seeks RMAC council.

Ken Zimmerman raised the issue of budgets and the February meeting for 2005. The group concurred that a February meeting of the full RMAC is not needed. Chuck Pritchard suggested a conference call in lieu of a full meeting, especially for Focus Groups.

Ken Zimmerman suggested that a time line be developed for projects to maintain direction and provide a target for completion.

Chuck Pritchard stated that RMAC is better equipped than the Board to bring in technical experts for testimony and then present that information to the Board, and this would be most useful to the Board. Mel Thompson asked if this included political entities as well. Chuck Pritchard affirmed that it does. Mr. Thompson also asked if RMAC has a say the Board's position on rangeland issues. Ken Zimmerman stated that the groups represented by RMAC do have a say in Board policy.

Henry Giacomini observed that it is important to maintain a balanced forum for discussion so that RMAC maintains credibility with the Board and public.

Clancy Dutra observed that historically when an issue was identified for review by RMAC, the RMAC Chair would appoint a sub-committee to address the issue. Subsequent to this method the Strategic Plan was developed that called for the

formation of Focus Groups that now serve this purpose. He also noted that Bob Kirsteins served as the Board range representative which does not exist today. This creates a gap of information flow between RMAC and the Board. Mr. Dutra noted that at one time there were continuous reports to the Board from RMAC, but this has declined over time.

Ken Zimmerman asked if a range rep for the Board has been nominated since Jack Hansen's resignation. Jeff Stephens responded that no nomination has been made known to him by the George Gentry. Ken Zimmerman suggested that each RMAC member report back to their respective constituents and encourage nominations for the vacant range position. Leonard Hale stated that these groups are where the nomination should come from.

Chuck Pritchard asked for additional input on the proposed white paper. Jeff Stephens recommended that the statute and mission as stated in the Strategic Plan be included for the benefit of new Board members. Mr. Pritchard will produce the white paper and send to Jeff Stephens for distribution. He recommended that a conference call be arranged to discuss the document and then adjourned the meeting.

Adjourned January 4, 2005 at 12:00 Noon